



Patent Application of

Gary L. Flinn

For

TITLE: TORTILLA CART WARMER

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS THIS APPLICATION CLAIMS THE BENEFIT OF PPA SER. NR. 60/465,521, FILED APRIL 28, 2003 BY THE PRESENT INVENTOR.

FEDERALLY SPONSORED RESEARCH NOT APPLICABLE

SEQUENCE LISTING OR PROGRAM NOT APPLICABLE

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION—FIELD OF INVENTION

This invention relates to display fixtures. More particularly, this invention relates to a method and means for warming packaged tortillas displayed in such fixtures.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Grocery stores and supermarkets, particularly bakery departments, stock baked products on display fixtures. These fixtures are usually constructed of wood, composites, or metal and are open to the store environment. One shortcoming of this type of display is that baked products cool to the temperature of the store environment, usually 75 degrees, within minutes of placement on these open fixtures. One of the main emphasis of supermarkets and grocery stores is freshness. Heated products, especially warm tortillas convey this idea of "right out of the oven" freshness.

BACKGROUND OF INVENTION—OBJECTS AND ADVANTAGES

Therefore, a primary object of the present invention is the provision of a means and method for maintaining warm baked products in these fixtures

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A further object of this invention is the displaying of baked products at a temperature above surrounding temperature.

A further object of this invention is the provision of a lower front panel and higher back panel to facilitate the normal rise of heated air from front to back.

A further object of this invention is the provision of a heated display fixture having a three-step panel extending across the display compartment so as to form an upper air well and a lower air well.

A further object of this invention is the provision of a heated display fixture wherein heated air flows from lower air well to upper air well over the three step panel to form a warm air curtain.

A further object of this invention is the provision of a three step panel fabricated of metal pans and ceramic tile to provide an heat sink.

A further object of this invention is the provision of a warmed display fixture, which is simple in construction, economical, and durable in use.

These and other objects will be apparent to one skilled in the art from the drawings, description, and claims, which follow.

SUMMARY

The present invention achieves the above objects by providing a warmed display fixture for displaying tortillas and baked products. The warmed display fixture includes a housing enclosing a display compartment and having an opening providing access thereunto. The display compartment has an upper portion, a lower portion, a front portion, and a rear portion. A three-step panel divides the display compartment into an upper air well above the three-step panel and a lower air well below the three-step

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panel. The three step panel has three horizontal metal pans and two vertical riser pans with ¼" ceramic tiles adhered to pans to provide a heat sink. This three-step panel also provides the surface for holding and displaying packaged products. Three heated rods are mounted to the bottom of the horizontal pans.

An air circulation passageway in the housing has an inlet in the upper air well of the display compartment, a plenum located at the rear of display compartment, and an outlet in the lower air well. A finned heater is mounted in the plenum below the inlet in the upper air well. Fans circulate the warmed air from the lower air well into the upper air well of the display compartment.

The configuration of the present invention encourages the warmed air to ascend from the lower front outlet of the lower air well to the upper rear inlet of the upper air well thus creating an air curtain surrounding the product. The three-step panel with heated ceramic tiles provides the product with heat from underneath the product.

DRAWINGS—FIGURES

FIG. 1 is a vertical side view of the display fixture of the present invention.

FIG. 2 is a perspective view of the display fixture of the present invention.

DRAWINGS—REFERENCE NUMERALS

| | |
|-----------------------|------------------------|
| 10 display fixture | 12 front panel |
| 14 bottom panel | 16 back panel |
| 18 top panel | 20 side panels |
| 22 transparent panels | 24 display compartment |
| 26 three-step panel | 26A top step |
| 26B middle step | 26C bottom step |

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| | |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 27A middle riser | 27B bottom riser |
| 28 top metal riser | 30 upper air passageway (inlet) |
| 32 rear air passageway (plenum) | 34 upper air well |
| 35 lower air well | 36 metal skin |
| 38 insulation | 40 heater rod |
| 42 coil heater | 44 fan motors |
| 46 lower air passageway (outlet) | 48 bottom frame |
| 50 locking castors | |

DETAILED DESCRIPTION—FIGS. 1 AND 2—PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

In the drawings and the descriptions, which follow, the warmed display fixture of the present invention is designated with reference numeral **10**. Referring to **Fig 1**, the warmed display fixture **10** is 36 inches from back to front and 40 inches wide. The front of display fixture **10** includes a front panel **12**, 7 inches high from the bottom panel **14**. The back panel **16** of the display fixture **10** is 30 inches in height. A top panel **18** extends horizontally 7 inches from the back panel **16**. The side panels **20** of the display fixture **10** is 36 inches from front panel **12** to back panel **16** and 30 inches in height. The side panels **20** stair steps down from the top of forward edge of top panel **18** down to front panel **12**. The upper portions **12A** and **12B** of front panel **12** is constructed of 7 inch high and 4 inch high respectively of clear glass, Plexiglas, or similar transparent material to enhance the visibility into the display compartment **24**. Likewise, the upper portions of side panels **20** include glass, Plexiglas, or other suitably transparent panels. Referring to **Fig 2**, the transparent panels **22** extend from the forward edge of top panel **18** down to front

left side and the front right side of front panel **12**. The glass panels form the final portions of the display fixture **10** and define an opening therein which provides access to the display compartment **24**. As seen in **Fig 1**, the back **16**, bottom **14**, front **12**, and top **18**, comprises an insulated panel having a layer of insulation **38** sandwiched between two spaced sheet metal skins **36**.

Referring to **Fig 2**, a stair step panel **26** is mounted in display fixture **10**. The stair step panel **26** consists of three horizontal steps and two riser steps constructed of metal pans with 4 inch ceramic tile adhered to pans. The three horizontal steps **26a**, **26b**, **26c**, each of 9 inch depth extend between sides **20** of display fixture **10**. Two risers **27a** and **27b** are attached to the front of the upper horizontal steps **26a** and **26b**. The risers, **27a** and **27b**, are each 6 inches in height and extend the full 40 inches between sides **20**. As illustrated in **Fig 1**, a top metal riser **28** is faced 4 inches from the inside of back panel **16** of display fixture **10** and extending from bottom panel **14** up to 6 inches above top step **26a**. Top metal riser **28** stops 4 inches below inside of top panel **18** of display fixture **10**. This opening is the upper air passageway **30** of display fixture **10**. The bottom of each step **26a**, **26b**, and **26c** have a heater rod **40** attached below it. The heater has paired rod bars extending along the bottom of step **26a**, **26b**, and **26c**. A coil heater **42** is mounted on the inside of top metal riser **28**. Two fans **44** are mounted on the front of top metal riser **28** in the lower air well **35**. The fans **44** pull air downward from the upper air passageway **30** through plenum **32** to lower air well **35** to lower air passageway **46** located inside of front panel **12** picking up heat created by the electric rod heaters **40** beneath each step **26a**, **26b**, and **26c** and coil heater **42** located behind top metal riser **28**.

For mobility, the display fixture **10** is mounted on bottom frame **48**. Four three inch locking castors **50** are mounted on the four legs of the bottom frame.

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OPERATION

In operation, the fans **44** draw air from the upper air well **34** through upper air passageway **30** over the coil heater **42** down through the plenum **32** to the lower air well **35** under the three step panel **26** picking up residual heat from the rod heaters **40** mounted underneath the steps **26a**, **26b**, and **26c**. From there the air is forced to the lower air passageway **46** and over the top of the three step panel **26** and back to the upper air passageway **30**. Thereafter, the cycle is repeated to maintain the desired heating effect.

Therefore, it may be seen that the tortillas or baked products which are placed upon the ceramic tiled steps **26a**, **26b**, and **26c** are warmed by rod heaters **40** located underneath each step and by the circulation of warm air over the surface of them. Also with the intake **30** being at the top of the three step panel **26**, much of the warm air that passes over the tortillas will be drawn upward and thus recycled.

CONCLUSION, RAMIFICATIONS, AND SCOPE

The present invention provides for the holding of tortillas and baked products at warmer temperatures than has been possible heretofore. The warm air curtain and step heaters warm the tortillas or baked products. Therefore, it can be seen that the present invention accomplishes its stated objectives.

It will be appreciated that the present invention can take many forms and embodiments. The true essence and spirit of the invention are defined in the appended claims, and it is not intended that the embodiment of the invention presented herein should limit the scope thereof.